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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 006719

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: IS\_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast  
12. Israeli elections  
13. Iran, nuclear program

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Key stories in the media:

All media report on Shimon Peres' quitting Labor and political activity and endorsing PM Sharon's Kadima. The Jerusalem Post reports that "former prime minister and Labor Party leader Shimon Peres ended weeks of speculation about his political future when he announced on Wednesday that he had decided to retire from the Knesset, endorse PM Sharon and join his attempt to bring about Middle East peace. If Sharon is re-elected as prime minister, Peres is to serve as a senior minister in charge of peace talks with the Palestinians and developing the Galilee and Negev regions. He does not intend to seek a Knesset seat with Sharon's new Kadima party, ending a record 46 years in the Knesset." According to a Ha'aretz-Dialog poll published Thursday, some 30% of Israelis say the move would increase the chances they would vote for Sharon's party, while 15% said it would decrease those chances. The poll shows that 47% of those polled said Sharon is their favorite candidate for prime minister, with Labor's Amir Peretz coming in a "distant second" with some 18%.

The media carry a host of reactions to Peres' move. Ha'aretz reports that Labor Chairman Peretz has not commented yet, but Labor MK Ofir Pines said Peres' "attempt to excuse the fact he abandoned ship for the sake of peace is pathetic." Likud's Netanyahu said the move "proves Kadima is headed leftward" and that "Labor II has been established." Meretz' Yosi Beilin said Peres "made a grave mistake" when he decided to join "Sharon's supermarket, whose few products have all expired." The Jerusalem Post reports that, in the wake of the Peres move, the Likud announced its new election slogan: "Vote Sharon, get Peres."

Yediot Aharonot reports that after 32 years in the Knesset, Meretz Chairman Yosi Sarid "made a final decision" to quit the party and politics. He will announce it officially tomorrow.

Ha'aretz reports that Moshe Feiglin, a Likud right-wing member, officially announced he is running for party leader and its candidate for prime minister yesterday. He presented a family-oriented social agenda, saying Israel should quit the Oslo process and annex all the land in Israel's hands at this time.

Ha'aretz reports that Justice Minister Tzipi Livni has stated publicly that the separation fence will serve as "the future border of the state of Israel" and that, "the High Court of Justice, in its rulings over the fence, is drawing the country's borders." Livni's remarks are in contradiction to the position of the state prosecution, which she oversees as justice minister. The prosecution has many times stated in court, when petitions against the separation fence were being heard, that the barrier is a "security" rather than a "political" fence, and that it is a temporary measure. "Just as the fence has been built, so it can

be taken down or moved," the prosecution has oft stated. Speaking a few days ago at a legal conference in Caesarea, Livni said: "One does not have to be a genius to see that the fence will have implications for the future border. This is not the reason for its establishment, but it could have political implications."

Ha'aretz follows-up on a report on Military Intelligence chief Major General Aharon Ze'evi's (Farkash) remarks Wednesday before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, where he said Hizballah had planned to unleash a massive barrage of rocket attacks on civilian targets in the north, encouraging an Israel Defense Forces reaction, in response to which the Lebanon-based organization had planned to launch rockets, including long-range Katyushas, at Israel's northern border last week. Referring to the Iranian issue, Ze'evi said that if by the end of March 2006, the international community does not manage to use diplomatic means to block Iran's effort to produce a nuclear bomb, "there will no longer be any reason to continue diplomatic activity in this field, and it will be possible to say that the international attempts to thwart [Iran's efforts] have failed." Several MKs, including the committee chairman, said they thought Ze'evi was saying military efforts would become necessary by April.

In a related story, Ma'ariv cited an unnamed "security source" as saying that "Israel will apparently have to get used to living with the fact that Iran has nuclear capabilities." The source said he sees "no power in the world that could change the situation at this time," saying that this would force Israel to think deeper about its strategic situation, while focusing on bolstering its conventional military capabilities. The source added that Israel would not be dragged into skirmishes by Hizballah provocations.

The Jerusalem Post reported that during a visit to the Kerem Shalom terminal crossing, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said Wednesday that Israel cannot accept a situation whereby "complete, accurate and real time information" on Palestinians traveling between Egypt and the Gaza Strip is withheld. Mofaz warned that if the PA fails to live up to its commitments in accordance with the US-brokered agreement, Israel will shut down the Karni and Erez terminal crossings and later turn them into international border crossings between Israel and Gaza, a step that will have severe economic repercussions for the PA. Mofaz intends to raise the issue in the coming week with European Union officials, and if the PA fails to amend the situation then conclusions will be drawn, security officials said. Five days since the crossing was officially opened, several thousand Palestinians have passed through the terminal, which is yet to become fully operational and is currently open four to five hours each day.

The Jerusalem Post reports that senior Fatah members are demanding that Marwan Bargutti, the Fatah activist who scored a landslide victory in PA primaries last week from his Israeli prison, be appointed deputy PA chairman.

The Jerusalem Post reports that 10 Palestinians were wounded in Nablus yesterday in clashes with IDF soldiers in pursuit of fugitives.

Yediot Aharonot reports that dozens of Israeli veteran combat soldiers were sent to northern Iraq over the past 18 months to establish special Kurdish security and antiterror units, and mainly to help establish the Hawler International Airport. They were sent there by Israeli commercial companies that produce military equipment and provided the Kurds with manpower and equipment to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. The Defense Ministry stated in reaction to this report that "it has never allowed any Israelis to operate in Iraq, and that if any operations have been taken, they were done privately and without permission."

## ¶1. Mideast

### Summary

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Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor writes in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Two large experiments in democracy have been held in the Arab world in recent years, and both ended with a grave democratic disappointment.. The Arab world wants to join the democratic world, but knows that the democratic tool would allow the rise to power of political Islam, which would cancel democracy.. Separating state from religion and banning religious

parties from any political elections could solve the problem."

Bloc quotes

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"God's Houses and Parliaments"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor writes in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Egypt and the Arab world were (once again) shocked -- the Muslim Brothers Party won 20% of the parliamentary seats in Egypt's democratic elections, and coupled with pro-Islamic parliamentarians, they hold 30% of the seats., which naturally came at the expense of President Mubarak's party. Two large experiments in democracy have been held in the Arab world in recent years, and both ended with a grave democratic disappointment: In the 1992 Algerian elections, the Islamic Salvation Front won no less than 82% of the vote.. Last year, the Americans imposed a democracy in Iraq, but it is still disappointing, with religious and ethnic parties returning to the political ring and the raging civil war.. The Arab world wants to join the democratic world, but knows that the democratic tool would allow the rise to power of political Islam, which would cancel democracy. How to solve this dilemma? Who could vouch that if elections are held in the PA, Hamas would not win and start ruling the same Palestinian Authority that Israel established to fight Hamas?. Turkey offers a model: separating state from religion. which might prove to be the coveted answer: if - as part of a regional covenant, under the auspices of the world's superpowers - all the Arab parliaments should decide on banning religious parties from any political elections, it could solve the problem."

[12. Israeli elections](#)

Summary

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Veteran columnist Yaron London writes in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The instinct that drives people toward the 'strongman' while ignoring his other qualities, searching his past, or finding what goes on in his skull, are the same instincts that created Fascist mass-supported parties."

Political commentator Evelyn Gordon writes in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: Sharon "is winking at the voters and saying: Vote for me because you know that I am lying.. For now, it looks as if the upcoming election will primarily be a referendum on Sharon's performance as prime minister. Thus voters are faced with a simple choice: They can say, loudly and clearly, that they are tired of being fed lies; that they want politicians to tell the truth about their intentions and thereby allow them to make a real choice about the country's future. Or, by reelecting Sharon, they can declare that not only is being lied to perfectly fine, but they actually prefer it to being told the truth."

Bloc quotes

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[11. "The Smell of Fascism is in the Air"](#)

Veteran columnist Yaron London writes in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Strange is the public's belief in a man who only yesterday was perceived as a corrupt warmonger. Scary is the race of notables to join the party that was born at his whim and totally depends on him. The instinct that drives people toward the 'strongman' while ignoring his other qualities, searching his past, or finding what goes on in his skull, are the same instincts that created Fascist mass-supported parties. We may find comfort in ignoring certain historical chapters and drawing hope from others: In many respects, PM Sharon is like French President Charles de Gaulle, who was deposed after changing his country's constitution, established a ruling party that was based on his big name, and pulled France out of Algeria."

[II. "The Fruit of Mendacity"](#)

Political commentator Evelyn Gordon writes in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "As Ha'aretz columnist Akiva Eldar aptly noted on Monday, Ariel Sharon currently appears poised to become the first person ever elected precisely because nobody believes a word he says.. Lying to the electorate has been the Israeli political norm for the last 13 years, ever since Yitzhak Rabin's victory in 1992.. Sharon's broken promises over disengagement inevitably undermined his credibility. But now, in a display of

true political genius, he is trying to turn this lack of credibility from a liability into an asset. Essentially, he is winking at the voters and saying: Vote for me because you know that I am lying.. for now, it looks as if the upcoming election will primarily be a referendum on Sharon's performance as prime minister. Thus voters are faced with a simple choice: They can say, loudly and clearly, that they are tired of being fed lies; that they want politicians to tell the truth about their intentions and thereby allow them to make a real choice about the country's future. Or, by reelecting Sharon, they can declare that not only is being lied to perfectly fine, but they actually prefer it to being told the truth. In that case, two things are certain. First, no Israeli politician will ever again consider honesty a viable policy; anyone who values integrity will understand that he does not belong in politics and quit. As a result, Israeli politics will become even more dishonest, corrupt, and debased than they already are. And second, Israelis will deserve every bit of it."

### 13. Iran, nuclear program

#### Summary

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Military correspondent Amir Rapoport writes in pluralist, popular Ma'ariv: "Sadly, there exists no military option to destroy the Iranian nuclear project. Europe (Russia excluded) and the United States are currently united in their willingness to threaten Iran with grave international sanctions if it does not stop its nuclear project., and should they fail, we will be left with the military option, but it is hard to believe that the [American] public would allow the administration to launch another military adventure whose end no one knows."

#### Bloc quotes

##### "There is No Military Option"

Military correspondent Amir Rapoport writes in pluralist, popular Ma'ariv: "Sadly, there exists no military option to destroy the Iranian nuclear project in an instant.. It is impossible because instead of running their nuclear project from a single facility, they dispersed its components all over Iran. There is no single site there that, if destroyed, would stop the project.. But there are ways to stop the nightmare of a nuclear bomb in the hands of an extremist ayatollahs regime.. Europe (Russia excluded) and the United States are currently united in their willingness to threaten Iran with grave international sanctions if it does not stop its nuclear project., and should they fail, we will be left with the military option., but when we remember the mud the Americans have sunken into in Iraq, it is hard to believe that the public there would allow the administration to launch another military adventure whose end no one knows. Given this complex reality, the conflicting remarks that senior Israeli security officials have been making regarding the Iranian bomb reflect an Israeli incompetence, more than confusion."

Jones